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SUBJECT: DEMARCHE: APPROACHING THE UAE ON CIVIL SOCIETY
PARTICIPATION IN 2008 BMENA EVENTS

REF: STATE 035438

Sensitive but unclassified. Please handle accordingly.

Summary

¶1. (SBU) Embassy is requested to meet with an appropriate MFA official to request that host government engage the UAE government to (1) stress the importance of civil society participation in G8-Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) events in 2008, (2) note the past practice of peer selection of civil society participants, and (3) press the UAEG to focus on reform-related BMENA themes this year.

Objectives

¶2. (SBU) Department requests that the Embassy pursue the following objectives:

--Request host government to inform the UAEG of the strong, positive tradition of civil society participation in BMENA events, including the Forum for the Future. NGOs that participate want to forge constructive relationships with governments to promote reform, not to embarrass governments.

--Request that host government stress to the UAE that civil society representatives to BMENA events should be peer-selected, not chosen by governments.

--Request host government to encourage the UAEG to adopt reform-related themes for BMENA events this year.

Reporting Deadline

¶3. (U) Embassies should report results of efforts by cable to NEA/PI Blake Thorkelson by April 23.

Background

¶4. (SBU) Since the inception of BMENA in 2004, civil society has been an important and growing element of the initiative. Among its objectives, BMENA seeks to support civil society activists in their efforts to promote democracy and reform, and to foster cooperative relationships with governments in achieving reform goals. Civil society representatives

participate in the annual Forum for the Future and the Forum Subministerial, making recommendations for action by civil society groups and governments. While NGO participation can cause nervousness with some governments, BMENA events have not been used in the past as platforms to attack governments. The NGOs that participate have consistently demonstrated their interest in working constructively with governments.

¶5. (SBU) The UAEG has agreed to include 25 civil society participants in the Forum Subministerial (scheduled for June 9-10 in Dubai) and 56-60 in the Forum Ministerial (scheduled for October 18-19 in Abu Dhabi). However, the UAEG wishes to select these representatives, contrary to the practice of the last four years. Since the beginning of the initiative, the participation of civil society has premised on the notion that civil society leaders themselves develop the criteria and select their representatives. These groups have valued their participation and select peers who reflect the diversity of civil society and can best take advantage of the meetings. If this practice were to change and BMENA government hosts were to select civil society representatives, we expect a negative reaction from civil society that will negatively affect cooperation in this year's meetings.

¶6. (SBU) The UAE is considering several unsuitable themes for the Forum for the Future, including environment and alternative energy, cultural globalization and national identity, international development assistance, and unemployment. These topics are addressed in other fora and are not in keeping with the Forum's traditional focus on political, economic, and social reform. Embassy Abu Dhabi reports that the UAEG may propose some refinements to these topics, including focusing on education for employment, female political participation, and press freedom, which are reform-related themes we could support.

¶7. (U) MFA senior officials who have been closely involved with the BMENA initiative include the following:

--Morocco: MFA Director-General of Bilateral Relations
Youssef Amrani
--Bahrain: MFA Director of Bilateral Relations Dr. Dhafer
Alumran
--Jordan: MFA Director of Negotiations Nawaf Tell

Amrani and Alumran will attend the Forum for the Future planning meeting in Tokyo on April 24-25.
RICE